"Put Yourself in His Place" - No 1 -

The Street-Car Conductor.

This is the first of a series of articles that will relate the trials of those who "wait" on the American Public and find it includes many who are irritable and irritating.

THE general public is remarkable for its good nature under circumstances that are more than ordinarily temper-taxing; but public or semi-public officials have good reason to know that here and there in the thousands are sundry individuals of different temperament.

The man who journeys homeward after a hard day's work does not find his temper improved by the fact that he has to stand on a car platform in the rain. He makes his half hour of discomfort an excuse for finding fault with the conductor, forgetting that the unlucky man in the uniform has been standing on the same platform in the same crowd, with the same rain driving in his face, for eight or ten hours.

The hasty public occasionally breaks into diatribe against the policeman whose club has swung solidly on the head of some lawbreaker. But the complainants do not realize that the officer has only resorted to force when all other expedients failed, or, perchance, when his own safety was in danger.

The busy man is in haste to get back to his desk. He berates the waiter because he is not instantly served, although a dozen others have ordered their luncheons and are likewise waiting with prior claim to service.

Mme. West Side drives downtown in her luxurious carriage and trips into one of the big stores. The young woman who waits on her stood in the elevated train for an hour, has been on her feet behind the counter all day attending to a throng of bargain hunters, and is nerve racked and weary. But if her fatigue manifests itself, or if Mme. West Side even imagines it, the floorwalker's reprimand is the least ill consequence the girl can expect.

Jones on the fourth floor demands more heat. Smith on the fifth floor finds it too warm. The janitor tries to compromise, and neither of the tenants is satisfied.

The Parlor Boarder demands onions in the hash, and the Two Gents on the Second Floor object to the fragrant but delectable vegetable. The Landlady tries to suit everybody and finds herself with rooms to let.

And so it goes.

Too often, thoughtlessly rather than maliciously, hasty and harsh words are dealt out to unwitting and involuntary offenders and even to those who only appear in that role to the distorted mental vision of the individual.

The next time you are tempted in this wise remember that your action is likely to render you ridiculous in the eyes of others and before you find fault

PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE.

THE EXPERIENCES OF A STREET CAR CONDUCTOR

I WENT to the street railway office at Fiftieth street and Seventh avenue and applied for a position as conductor. I was engaged and told to come around the following Monday morning.

When I arrived at the car barns I was immediately singled out as a new man by the crowd going on duty. Everyone looked at me sympathetically. I began to feel like the hero at a funeral, or a volunteer for some dangerous undertaking.

"Have you ever been troubled with heart disease?" asked one gray-haired veteran, looking at me with blue eyes that had in them the patience of Job.

"No, sir," I answered.

"That's in your favor," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

He did not answer, and a tutor conductor took me in hand and showed me how to ring up fares and fill out my blanks. We started down Broadway from the car barns.

At Forty-second street a woman with a lap dog stopped the car. We ran ten feet beyond where she stood, and she climbed in with a red face and immediately demanded to know why I hadn't stopped the car where she was.

The First Difficulty.

"The motorman stopped the car, madam," I answered, holding out my hand for her fare. She handed me a $20 bill.

"I cannot change it," I said.

"But you must," she answered.

I stopped the car for her to get off. She snuggled down in the corner of the seat and frowned. The dog barked and the baby began to cry. A car behind came up with a clanging bell.

"I am in no hurry," said the woman. "I got on here to get that changed." A policeman got on the car and she fished out a dime with a hole in it and offered it to me.

I handed the dime back and she immediately refused to take it, saying that she didn't take bad money. In desperation I rang for the car to go ahead.

I went down and spoke to the policeman about the weather, under my breath. The woman saw it and supposing I was about to do something ugly presented a bright new nickel.

At Forty-second street a lean, hawk-eyed man got on and gave me a Fourteenth street transfer.

"That is not good here, sir," I said, handing it back to him.

"What!" he thundered. "You refuse to take that? I'll have you fired. I'll sue this road for damages. You can't bulldoze me!" And he snatched the transfer and jumped up to ring the bell for the car to stop. He got hold of the fare bell and rang up several fares in quick succession. Then, as I remonstrated, he jerked the bell rope and the car came to a stop.

He jumped off, and taking out a little book began to write my number and the number of the car. We were on our way again when he discovered that he had not given me the last word and came running after us, shouting wildly.

At that a man in the front of the car was moved to sympathy, and coming down to me peered at my number and then shaking his fist in my face cried out that he would write to the company and back up the other man's complaint. I began to feel nervous. A smile on the face of the tutor conductor put me at rest, and the passenger shouted:

"The Interurban Railroad Company will suffer for this outrage. I'll witness it."

"This isn't the Interurban," said a well-dressed man calmly eyeing him. "It is a branch of the Union Railway. The Union Railway recently absorbed it."

"It is the New York City Railway," said another, getting up and ringing the bell. He immediately bolted for the door.

A Passenger Falls.

"Wait till the car stops, please!" I said warningly. But he jumped, struck on a slippery pavement and rolled over. Then I stopped the car, went back to help him up, and asked his name.

"None of your business," he said. "I have got a suit against you for this. I'll make you sweat." And he began taking the names of the people standing around. He had refused to give me his name, and after taking the names of several witnesses I went on. My head was in a whirl.

I began to take up fares, and in two blocks more discovered I had three bad coins. When I tried to pass these out again I found that it was not so easy. Finally I got rid of them, only to find that I had taken in two more.

The day moved on with various minor interruptions. Late in the afternoon we were coming down Broadway.

At Twenty-third street a woman suddenly jumped up and cried out:

"Why didn't you let me off at Twenty-eighth street?"

"You didn't ask me, madam!" I responded.

"Yes, I did, too. Why don't you pay attention to your work? Give me your number, sir. I will see about you. My husband——." Here the car stopped and she got off, talking volubly and stepping down facing the rear. The car hadn't quite stopped, and I touched her arm in expectation of her falling.

She turned like a flash and exclaimed, "Keep your hands off me, you rude creature! I belong to the Transit Improvement League, and my husband is leader of his district. I'll go to My Root and have you discharged."

I could see trouble piling up for me.

Lessons in Manners.

There were all sorts of complaints from the passengers. Late in the day a lady half way up the car exclaimed:

"Conductor, this man at my side is stepping on my foot. Please to stop him."

I politely asked him to be careful. He did not even look at me, and I went back to the door.

In a minute more she cried out again: "Conductor, this man persists in stepping on my feet. Will you please stop him?"

"I am very sorry that he does it," I said, "but I cannot stop him. I will stop the car at the next policeman who appears and call him into the car."

"I didn't step on her!" said the gentleman, looking angrily first at her and then at me.

"Yes, you did!" she responded. And turning to me she demanded "What are you here for, if not to protect your passengers? I will see about this. What is your number?"

"My number is on my cap, madam. You can see it."

"What is the number of this car? There are two numbers on it. What does that mean? Oh, I know the tricks of this company to deceive people."

And she stared at the number printed by the manufacturer of the car and then at the number of the car in the company's service.

Thinking that the incident was closed, I went back to the door to help in an old lady. She smiled in my face and thanked me. The smile made up for all the trouble that had been heaping itself upon my shoulders, and I determined to preserve the most exquisite politeness to every one in spite of the trouble makers.

The man who had stepped on the lady's feet got up to leave, and in lurching for a strap hit the old lady's hat and knocked it askew. She righted it with an "Excuse me, please, sir," and the man jumped off.

The woman who had complained of him looked daggers at me, but said nothing. The next day I started out with the determination not to let anything trouble me. I ate a hearty breakfast, braced my shoulders, and during the first few hours realized that the weather, which was fine, had a remarkable effect upon every one. The passengers seemed to feel that it was not necessary to quarrel this day. The most persistent trouble makers evidently get out on wet and muggy days, just after a decided change in the weather.

Looking for Trouble.

But there was one little incident. We were speeding down Broadway about noon.

Three nervous little women then asked me separately for transfers to Brooklyn Bridge cars. I told them we did not transfer to the bridge, and they asked me to tell them where to get off.

"Get off at City Hall, please," I answered.

We had gone three blocks when they frantically stopped the car, and when it had come to a dead standstill asked if we had gone by City Hall. Ringing up the fares and striking the bell to go ahead, I made my way up to where they sat and told them that I would inform them when to get off. Six times on the way down Broadway they asked me again whether we had yet reached City Hall. At City Hall I stopped for them to get off, but they sat mute and still. I told them this was City Hall, and they thanked me, adding,

"We will go to South Ferry!"

By that I saw that they probably knew the city as well as I did and were only making me trouble to make me remember that I was a public servant.

Thursday morning was rainy. Everyone was out of sorts. The air was pregnant with animosity. We made the first trip downtown without serious trouble.

On the return trip, however, a portly gentleman with a red face looked me stolidly in the eye when I asked for his fare, and finally said, "I never pay in advance. When I have had my ride I will pay you." I tried to argue him out of this eccentricity, telling him that it made me more work in that I had to keep him in mind at all times.

"Well, what are you paid for?" he demanded angrily.

At Grace Church he got up, offered me a Canadian ten cent piece, and when I refused to take it, snarled out that I had insulted King Edward, and he would make it a personal matter and go to see the British Consul. He finally gave me an American coin, and then discovered that he had gone by his street. At that he demanded that I should carry him back, and when I refused, rode to the end of the route with the express purpose of getting even with me.

There he refused to pay his fare back, and it took the sound advice of a policeman on the corner to convince him that he must do it. He said he would not ride on my car, and hired a carriage and rode parallel with us, snarling at the motorman every time he could make himself heard above the rumble of the cars.

I began to understand what was in the minds of the old conductors when they looked at me pityingly.

Too Young to Pay.

At 125th street a woman with a determined look in her eyes and her lips pursed like the mouth of a paper bag tied with twine got on and took a ten years old boy on her knee. When I held out my hand for the fares she put five cents in it.

"The boy?" I asked, raising my eyebrows and trying to speak conciliatorily.

"He is not old enough to pay for," she said.

"How old is he, please?" I asked.

"I have never paid for him!" she said, with a snap of her eyes that brought sparks from them.

"I think he must be old enough to pay a fare," I said.

She kept up the discussion till we had reached 115th street, and there she got out with a toss of her head and left the car.

I tried to count up the people who had promised to complain to me, but after the seventh or eighth I got confused and gave it up with a heavy heart.

"They seldom write," said the tutor conductor kindly. "Don't worry about it."

Friday began pretty well. The public was more to my liking this day, and I was thanking my lucky stars for it when we came down past 110th street, and the car came to a sudden stop.

Troubled by a Dog.

A man leading a dog got on the car and released it in the aisle.

"You will have to keep the dog in your lap, sir," I said, softly.

"What's that?" he demanded, standing up.

"It is against the——"

"Don't you talk back to me, sir. That dog is a gentleman. He is a full-blooded English bulldog."

"I beg your pardon, but——"

"Now, don't you dare talk to me. I know my rights."

The dog jumped up in the lap of a lady, smudging her dress. She screamed, and I tried to catch the little brute.

"Let that dog alone!" shouted the owner, rising so suddenly that he hit his silk hat against the strap pole. "I am a cousin of the captain of this precinct, and you can't abuse me, or my dog."

The car was in an uproar. The motorman stopped it, and came back with his brass controller in his hand. The dog sprang out through the door and bounded away. The owner followed, calling to me to wait till he caught him.

At 110th street, while the car was crowded with shoppers, I discovered a woman standing on a crossing ahead.

She Wanted to Know.

We came to a stop there and I reached up for the bell by way of a reminder to her that we were late and she should step lively. She stood quietly on the street and asked:

"Where is No. 6 West Ninety-ninth street?"

"Get in and I will show you as we pass," I said.

"I don't want to get in. I want to know where it is."

I stared at her in amazement.

"Did you stop the car to ask me that?" I asked.

"Don't you get angry, young man," she said, and I replied: "I think that the next street is No. 99."

At Fifty-ninth street a young man with a very important air stood up suddenly and shouted to me:

"Conductor, stop the car!"

I stopped it on the next corner.

"Give me a transfer back up the street," he demanded.

I refused, of course. He immediately told me that I was not onto my job, and he guessed I didn't know his father was a Senator at Albany. This discussion lasted for some time.

Just before noon Saturday a man got on the car at Fifty-ninth street and paid a fare. At Forty-second street he suddenly got up and demanded a transfer.

"You should have asked for it when you paid your fare," I gently admonished him.

"You give me the transfer and don't talk back. My uncle is a director of this road. He will fix you."

Hard Day's Work.

I had read Mark Twain myself and was up to the trick. I gave him the transfer, however, and let him off to escape another quarrel. But now I began to realize that no matter what some one had just called you, no matter how your blood boiled over the last incident, it was very important that when some other person spoke to you you should come up with a smiling face and never a tremor in your voice.

There is something suggestive in an irritated tone that will embroil you with a whole carful of people if you let it.

The day dragged on with all sorts of troublesome and irritating disturbances. Finally I went to the tutor conductor and asked him what was the matter with me. He replied that there was nothing the matter.

I had, he said, kept my temper remarkably well, and had had fewer scraps than the ordinary conductor in a week's run. If I stuck to the work I would get hardened, and when I was I could sleep like a top, though I knew that five hundred letters were being written to the management about me.

In spite of my troubles and the abuse that had been heaped upon me, I still had faith that the temper of the average American citizen was comparatively even. During the week I had experienced much kindly treatment at the hands of men and women who seemed to sympathize with me, and had some idea of the difficulties of my position. I was devoutly thankful for this.

Nevertheless I could take oath that one conductor in New York had earned his salary by the writhing of his nerves.

The Motorman's Troubles.

I discovered during my first week as a conductor that the troubles of the man inside the car are no greater than those of the motorman. There are a great number of truckmen and carriage drivers who delight to make difficulties for the man on the front platform of the car.

Truckmen get into the tracks ahead, and, on pretext of having heavy loads, refuse to turn out and let the car pass till they have delayed it for five or even ten minutes. There are innumerable people who like to walk across in front of the cars in imminent danger of their lives.

Truckmen sit by the hour on their wagons abusing the motormen who are trying to hurry past to their destination. If the motorman so much as replies to the reproaches thrown at him, the truckman is off his perch with his sleeves rolled up ready for a fight.

The continual watchfulness necessary on the part of the motorman wears on his nerves and in the end produces mental and physical disorders that cannot be made up by salaries or vacations.

NEXT week the "Put Yourself in His Place" series will deal with the life of the Policeman.